

Respectful, Reciprocal and Responsible 21st Century Collaboration: The Master of Education in Teaching Program Partnership with K-12 Professional Development Schools

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MEdT Program Principles

The Master of Education in Teaching Program is a two-year, field-based program designed for candidates desiring a career in teaching who have completed baccalaureate degrees in fields other than education. Founded in 1991, the Master of Education in Teaching (MEdT) program has three principles that underlie the program and guide strategic planning: a) Students take responsibility for their own learning, b) Student teachers become skilled in the methods of practitioner research, and c) Student teaching practice integrates preservice teacher preparation and inservice professional development opportunities (McEwan, 1996). Placing candidates in professional development school classrooms throughout the four semester master degree program enables student teachers to become skilled in the methods of practitioner research through the integration of preservice and inservice professional development renewal. MEdT candidates are placed in supportive elementary and secondary cohort structures of approximately twenty-five candidates. MEdT student teachers are actively engaged in the work of field teaching two days weekly during the first and second semesters. During the third semester, student teachers are in their field classrooms each day of the week and complete a culminating solo-teaching unit plan. At the completion of the third semester, MEdT teacher candidates are eligible for State of Hawaii licensure as highly qualified teachers. The final semester of the MEdT program is the internship semester where candidates focus on completing educational research projects and graduate degree requirements while working in varied paid or unpaid field teaching positions (University of Hawaii College of Education, 2013).

What are Professional Development Schools?

In the mid-1980s, the term Professional Development School (PDS) began to emerge as education language in the United States. Grade P-12 and university professional development school partnerships began with four objectives: a) preparing future educators, b) providing current educators with ongoing professional development, c) encouraging joint school-university faculty investigation of education-related issues, and d) promoting the learning of P-12 students. In 2001, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) developed five standards and detailed four-level rubrics to evaluate the efficacy and developmental level of Professional Development Schools (NCATE, 2001). The National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) further identified nine “Essentials” in 2009 that need to all be present for a school-university relationship to be called a Professional Development School. The nine required essentials of a PDS are:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
 2. A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
 3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
 4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;
 5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants;
 6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved;
 7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration;
 8. Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and
 9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.
- (NAPDS, 2008)

Significance of Professional Development School Partnerships

In *Powerful Teacher Education*, Linda Darling-Hammond (2006) outlines common components of effective teacher education programs that emerged from case studies of seven exemplary programs. It is significant that findings reference positive university program features made possible through clinical experiences and teaching practice in professional development school partnerships:

- A common, clear vision of good teaching permeates all course-work and *clinical experiences*.
- Well-defined standards of practice and performance are used to guide and evaluate coursework and *clinical work*.
- Curriculum is grounded in knowledge of child development, learning, social contexts and subject matters, taught in the *context of practice*.
- Extended *clinical experiences* are carefully developed to support the ideas and practices presented in simultaneous, closely interwoven coursework.
- Explicit strategies help students confront their own deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about learning and students learn about the experiences of people different from themselves.
- Strong relationships, common knowledge, and shared beliefs *link school- and university-based faculty*.
- Case study methods, teacher research, performance assessments, and portfolio evaluation apply learning to *real problems of practice*. (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 41)

Further, Aaron Levine, in his 2006 report, *Educating School Teachers*, cited professional development schools as “a superb laboratory for education schools to experiment with the initiatives designed to improve student achievement” (p. 105). He further indicated that a PDS can “offer perhaps the strongest bridge between teacher education and classroom outcomes, academics and clinical education, theory and practice, and schools and colleges” (p. 105). Sharon Robinson, president and CEO of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), posited that PDSs “are emerging as particularly effective, evidence-based school-university partnership models in many sites across the nation, providing academic content and pedagogical instruction that is well-integrated with extensive, closely supervised, hands-on, in-school clinical experience” (NAPDS 2008, p. 2). There is strong U.S. support for professional development schools as the sites for teacher education.

Shift to graduate level teacher education.

As a side note, there is a growing interest in graduate level teacher education in addition to using professional development schools as part of teacher education. Finland is the frontrunner in student academic performance ranking first in the world in reading and scientific literacy and second (behind Hong Kong) in mathematics. It is interesting to note that Finland educates all of its teachers in master's degree programs that include strong content preparation and instructional preparation in model professional development partner schools using a reflective, inquiry-oriented approach to teaching diverse learners (Darling-Hammond, 2012). In the past twenty years, many countries – including Australia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Canada and Taiwan – have followed Finland's lead and moved teacher education to the graduate level, adding in-depth pedagogical study and field internships (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

MEdT and Professional Development Partnerships

The Master of Education in Teaching program is a graduate teacher licensure program that emphasizes learning through collegial interaction at professional development field schools. The collaborative partnerships with professional development schools are central to the goal of merging educational theory with contextualized educational practice. The University of Hawaii College of Education believes the MEdT program to be the capstone teacher education program and indeed, schools call to request graduates to hire from this program. MEdT faculty members continuously share reflections on the challenges and strengths of the Master of Education in Teaching program during monthly faculty meetings to monitor and adjust program effectiveness.

Partnership challenges.

MEdT program coordinators and partner school representatives summarize the challenges of working with the MEdT program into three broad categories: a) Teacher Teaming, b) Teacher Inclusion, and c) Teacher Evaluation.

Teacher teaming.

Teachers, both preservice and inservice, would benefit from increased knowledge and skill about how to work in teams. There is no "I" in team or teacher. Collaboration among educators is necessary, not just as role models of 21st century teaming for

students, but because research reveals that high-performing schools effectively utilize professional learning communities. In fact, peer learning among small groups of teachers was the most powerful predictor of improved student achievement over time (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). It does take a village to raise a child's achievement. Yet, a significant challenge in forming school-university partnerships is finding and nurturing educators capable of collaborative teaming with teacher candidates, colleagues and university instructors. Sadly, for the most part, teaching continues to occur in isolation and teacher preparation programs do not intentionally equip teachers to team.

Teacher inclusion.

There are a limited number of mentor teachers selected to partner with MEdT teacher candidates each semester. This has resulted in perceptions of school community divisiveness, particularly if the principal recommended only a select few mentor teachers to receive a MEdT student teaching partner. University MEdT instructors can facilitate school wide professional development workshops for all teachers as one means of unifying the school learning community. Nonetheless, the fact remains that the profession desires strong mentor teachers as guides to entry level teachers and this merit-based selection might trigger feelings of competition and resentment within the school.

Teacher evaluation.

In this era of education accountability, there is tremendous pressure on teachers to positively impact student growth as part of their formal teaching evaluations. The State of Hawaii Department of Education (2013) is piloting a *Hawaii Educator Effectiveness* (EES) evaluation system whereby teachers will now be evaluated on a) classroom observations (with pre- and post-conferences) using *Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching*, b) *Roster Verification and Cambridge Educations' Tripod Student Surveys*, c) the *Student Growth Model*, which compares growth on results from standardized tests over time with "academic peers" to compute an annual *Student Growth Percentile*, and d) *Student Learning Objectives* as a means to achieve learning objectives at the school level.

Partnership strengths and opportunities.

Participants at the university and at the professional development school believe the positives outweigh the challenges of nurturing the MEdT teacher education partnerships (Port, Murakami, Saranchock & Ichimura, 1996). There continues to be a U. S. national and international trend toward graduate teacher education programs with characteristics

similar to the MEdT program (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The reciprocal, relational aspect of continuous professional development, shared funding, and the infusion of collaborative research emerge as two noteworthy MEdT strengths and opportunities.

Reciprocal and relational professional development.

Relationships. A major benefit of placing teacher candidates in a professional development school for three to four semesters is that members of the school staff develop close relationships with and pride in the accomplishments of the candidates. MEdT assignments are designed to prompt professional dialogue between teacher candidates and mentor teachers throughout the program, which stimulates teachers to reflect on their practice. A principal of a Hawaii Department of Education public high school reports,

The MEdT program keeps us on our “professional” toes. It’s like having company at home; family members try harder to show their best behavior. We pay attention to being positive, solution-oriented professionals, and, as a result, we have developed a more collegial atmosphere in the school. (Port, Murakami, Saranchock & Ichimura, 1996, p. 9)

Professional development schools report that teacher candidates are positive role models for students and a welcome support as additional personnel for classroom management, instructional differentiation in the classroom, and class field trips (Port, Murakami, Saranchock, & Ichimura, 1996). Teacher candidates bring new energy to the school and have created culturally-based curriculum units, started garden projects, facilitated technology innovations like promethium boards and twitter, organized safety fairs, founded co-curricular service learning clubs, and pioneered alternative assessments.

Shared funding.

At times, The MEdT program has been a source of funding that has enabled mentor teachers to be released from their classrooms for professional development and/or team planning. Historically, mentor teachers received funding from the university to visit other schools and attend education conferences to support school improvement initiatives. Current budget restrictions at the State of Hawaii level are inhibiting both teacher candidate internship stipends and mentor teacher professional development funding. However, new opportunities for collaborative grant writing are emerging, as many educational grants that the university applies for require community and local school partners.

Collaborative research.

Candidates complete a qualitative inquiry resulting in a “School Portrait” during the first year of the MEdT program, which provides a descriptive mirror for the professional development school and reflective insight into schooling for the teacher candidates. Teacher candidates work collaboratively with colleagues placed within their school to learn about what makes the learning community unique and special, as well as the challenges faced in fostering a supportive, effective, learning environment. Candidates interview at least two members of the professional development school to gain participants’ perspectives. From this exploration, candidates articulate, through a multimedia presentation for classmates, their sense of purpose, or role within their school and community.

The culminating inquiry project for MEdT candidates is the Plan B Inquiry Project. Candidates select an education topic that has peaked their interest during the first two semesters of their program and conduct in-depth exploratory qualitative research on the topic within their unique teaching and learning professional development teaching contexts. Plan B Inquiries often take the form of qualitative teacher action research, where the teacher intentionally implements an instructional intervention aimed to positively impact student achievement or improve an observed problem in teaching practice. Examples of Plan B Inquiry topics include the exploration of effects of Hawaiian curriculum units, service-learning projects, advisory, technology integration, English Language Learner strategies, content-based instructional strategies, parent communication, Elder Advisory Councils, cross-age peer tutoring and mentor relationships. Mentors from the professional development schools often participate in the Plan B Inquiry projects and findings from these studies have led to school-wide renewal and changes in instructional practice (Port, Murakami, Saranchock & Ichimura, 1996). For example, Kessler, Zuercher and Wong (2013) published a study on how the University of Hawaii MEdT program partnered with Moanalua Middle School to implement Thinking Maps as a research-based instructional strategy in a professional development school in the *Journal of the National Association for Professional Development Schools*. Student grade-level reading proficiency increased to 86% within the three years that this professional development school-university partnership initiated Thinking Maps as a school-wide initiative.

Conclusion

The University of Hawaii Master of Education in Teaching Program partners with professional development K-12 school partners as a significant program characteristic. There is growing U.S. and International trends towards both graduate teacher education and professional development school partnerships, like the MEdT program. Institutions are encouraged to strategically consider the strengths and challenges inherent in partnerships with professional development schools when designing new teaching education programs, within unique learning contexts. Professional development school partnerships provide a milieu for creating respectful, reciprocal and responsible models of teacher education for the 21st Century.

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